

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The remarks of Mr. GRAMS pertaining to the introduction of S. 487, S. 488, S. 489, and S. 490 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, Dr. Carter G. Woodson was the son of former slaves. He believed passionately that the solution to injustice was education. If Americans from different backgrounds could learn to see our similarities and appreciate our differences, he believed, we could end the fear that is at the heart of racial discrimination.

So, in February 1926, Dr. Woodson proposed the first Negro History Week as a way to preserve African American history and promote greater understanding among all Americans. Over the years, as the civil rights movement progressed, Negro History Week evolved into what we now know as Black History Month.

This month, as our nation once again pauses to reflect on the achievements and experiences of African Americans, we celebrate the birthdays of several renowned leaders, including Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, and Barbara Jordan. We also celebrate the founding 90 years ago of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, one of this century's most powerful engines for social and economic justice.

It is right and fitting that we acknowledge such famous people and important milestones. But it is also important to recall the contributions of other African Americans who were less well known, but who contributed much to their communities. Today I want to pay tribute to two such men from my home state of South Dakota: Oscar Micheaux and Ross Owens.

Oscar Micheaux was a gifted, early filmmaker who settled in Gregory, South Dakota, in the early 1900s. His company, the Micheaux Film Corporation, was responsible for producing films that ran counter to Hollywood's negative portrayal of African Americans at that time.

Ross Owens was a 1925 graduate of my alma mater, South Dakota State University. Not only was he inducted into SDSU's Athletic Hall of Fame, but his masters thesis, "Leisure Time Activities of the American Negro Prior to the Civil War", became a classic in African American history and physical education.

One can only wonder what else Mr. Micheaux and Mr. Owens might have achieved had they been born later, after the civil rights movement toppled many of the barriers to equality that existed during their lifetimes.

Today, thanks to the vision of leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall and John Lewis, as well as countless other Americans

whose names are less well known but whose courage was no less real, many of those barriers are gone. Our nation no longer tolerates legal discrimination. We no longer permit injustices like poll taxes, "separate but equal" schools, and segregated public facilities. We have moved closer to that ideal on which our nation was founded: that all men—and women—are created equal. And we are all better for it.

Today, as our country thrives, millions of African Americans are sharing the benefits of the best economy in decades. But not all African Americans have been given the opportunity to share in America's economic progress. Not all of the barriers have been torn down. There is still work to be done. As we prepare to enter the new century, we must remain committed to equal educational opportunity, and economic and social justice—for all Americans.

This month, as we celebrate Black History Month, let us recall the words of the poet Langston Hughes, who wrote of a land "where opportunity is real, life is free, and equality is in the air we breathe." And let us rededicate ourselves to finishing the task of establishing that land here, in the United States.

THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Wednesday, February 24, 1999, the federal debt stood at \$5,620,229,439,635.41 (Five trillion, six hundred twenty billion, two hundred twenty-nine million, four hundred thirty-nine thousand, six hundred thirty-five dollars and forty-one cents).

One year ago, February 24, 1998, the federal debt stood at \$5,522,503,000,000 (Five trillion, five hundred twenty-two billion, five hundred three million).

Five years ago, February 24, 1994, the federal debt stood at \$4,541,555,000,000 (Four trillion, five hundred forty-one billion, five hundred fifty-five million).

Ten years ago, February 24, 1989, the federal debt stood at \$2,722,784,000,000 (Two trillion, seven hundred twenty-two billion, seven hundred eighty-four million).

Fifteen years ago, February 24, 1984, the federal debt stood at \$1,454,599,000,000 (One trillion, four hundred fifty-four billion, five hundred ninety-nine million) which reflects a debt increase of more than \$4 trillion—\$4,165,630,439,635.41 (Four trillion, one hundred sixty-five billion, six hundred thirty million, four hundred thirty-nine thousand, six hundred thirty-five dollars and forty-one cents) during the past 15 years.

SOLDIERS', SAILORS', AIRMEN'S, AND MARINES' BILL OF RIGHTS ACT OF 1999

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of S. 4, The Soldiers', Sailors', Airmen's, and Marines' (SSAM) Bill of Rights Act of 1999. This bill addresses critical person-

nel and retention issues in our nation's armed forces and hopefully will arrest the accelerating decline in military readiness. I commend the distinguished chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator WARNER, and the Committee as a whole for reporting this legislation.

I have been concerned for quite some time with declining defense budgets and increased deployments overseas. Those who defend the United States often are the first casualties of budget cuts here at home, even as they have been deployed overseas more frequently than ever before. Declining morale in our armed forces and diminished military readiness are national security legacies this Administration is leaving, legacies I hope the Senate will begin reversing with the passage of S. 4.

Our military is hemorrhaging due to poor morale, plentiful private sector opportunities in a robust economy, and burdensome deployment schedules. The pay and benefit provisions in S. 4 will be critical to arrest declining morale and diminished readiness. As General Hugh Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, stated before the Senate Armed Services Committee last September, "... we must act soon to send a clear signal to the backbone of our military, our mid-grade commissioned and non-commissioned officers, that their leadership and this Congress recognize the value of their service and their sacrifices and that we have not lost sight of our commitment to the success of the all-volunteer force."

Mr. President, the Administration has taken too long to address the morale and retention problems undermining the readiness of our armed forces. Senior Pentagon officials downplayed evidence of growing personnel and readiness problems for months, but finally began addressing these issues squarely before the Senate Armed Services Committee last September. General Shelton stated that "... our forces are showing increasing signs of serious wear. Anecdotal initially, and now measurable, evidence indicates that our readiness is fraying and that the long-term health of the total force is in jeopardy."

A cursory survey of declining defense budgets and increased operations around the world certainly provides the factual background to support General Shelton's statement. For many leaving the forces today, military compensation and benefits simply do not justify extended deployments away from home.

Our military is doing more with less. Defense spending has declined in real terms by 27 percent since 1990. Military procurement spending has declined by a staggering 54 percent during that same time period. In the midst of this dramatic downsizing, the pace of operations abroad has risen dramatically. In the 1990s, operational missions increased 300 percent while the force structure for the Army and Air Force